

# MID CANTERBURY HERALD



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## Ashburton to LA

By LAURA MELVILLE



Movie man: Ashburton film producer Ken Robinson relaxes after intensive filming in Christchurch on a new project that is set to put Canterbury on the map.

A Canterbury film project that is on its way to Hollywood was driven by the passion of an Ashburton producer who wants to put the region on the map.

Ken Robinson is fired up about the opportunities of film-making in South Island.

While the expectation was that big projects could only develop in Auckland, technology made it possible to tap into world-class talent on our doorstep, he says.

Mr Robinson was back in Ashburton last week after filming in Christchurch on a new feature film called *Holy Roller*.

The project has gathered together a wealth of local and national talent, and already has Hollywood distributors lining up.

The 90-minute feature was written by Australian actor Angus Benfield, who has made Christchurch his home.

Mr Benfield and Mr Robinson are co-producing the project and have put together a "dream-team crew" that includes Kiwi acting icon Mark Hadlow, Christchurch-based actress Victoria Abbott, Australian actor Jeremy Brennan and Spanish-based actor Mike Maxwell.

The director is Christchurch's Patrick Gillies.

The technical crew consists of local names who have all been involved in huge projects overseas, including films such as *Spiderman* and *Men in Black*, Mr Robinson said.

Shooting ended two weeks ago and the feature is being edited, with a trailer and rough cut being put together for distribution to Los Angeles producers before the New Zealand release in the middle of the year. The film has been accepted for theatrical

release in New Zealand and Australia.

"Angus is a New Zealand film distributor so it has been a reciprocal arrangement with Hollywood producers and distributors," Mr Robinson explained.

"We have got Hollywood executives who are keen to look at the film."

While the contacts were there, he believed the story had sold

itself.

"Our film comes at a very good time. It is a product that is fresh and exciting, and it is a contemporary story.

"It doesn't matter whether the story is set in Ireland, in New Zealand, or in Australia. Hollywood is looking for new ideas."

With a budget of under \$1 million, the producers managed to bring on board independent investors

to finance it.

The film tells the story of a burnt-out pastor who saves a nightclub owner's life.

The pastor sees the incident as a miracle, but the nightclub owner, looking for a way to relieve himself of debts to a local mob boss, offers the use of his nightclub to the pastor as a church.

Mr Robinson said the film opened a can of worms that would

have viewers guessing until the end.

"It is a comedy-drama. It has romance, it has everything," he said.

Filming over the past few weeks was intensive, with the crew often working throughout the night to complete the shooting in three weeks.

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## Ashburton gets in behind filming

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"We had a window of opportunity," Mr Robinson explained.

Ownership of the project by Christchurch businesses, the council and industries had streamlined the project.

Mr Robinson said that companies had come forward to offer assistance, from BMW making a car available, to Base nightclub handing over their premises for five days for filming, to assistance from Christchurch property developer Dave Henderson.

The Salvation Army contributed clothing for wardrobe requirements, with about 100 extras being used in filming.

"This wouldn't have happened in Auckland. People from the community came out and said, 'we want to help'."

For Mr Robinson, the project is about tapping into local talent and resources. He uses Ashburton as a base to develop his video production company Boomtown Studios and has put the making of a heartland film set in the district in the pipeline.

Mr Robinson came to Ashburton as a child and returned after working in Christchurch and Dunedin.

"It felt like I was coming home. There is something about Mid Canterbury that is in my blood."



Crew time: Ken stands with the crew from *Holy Roller*.



On set: Ashburton producer Ken Robinson works with the camera assistant on the set of *Holy Roller*.



In sync: (Left) Victoria Abbott rides on the shoulders of Angus Benfield during a scene from *Holy Roller*.



And action: (Right) Australian actor Jeremy Brennan with Mike Maxwell, as the hitman Declan.



Shoot scene: Patrick Duffy plays a mugger who holds up Angus Benfield in *Holy Roller*.



Star time: Ken on the set of *Holy Roller* with Mark Hadlow, left, and Mike Maxwell.

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